

Text: Psalm 49

Purpose: that the hearers more fully trust the resurrected Jesus than their income level

Everyone has to pay attention today, because the Psalm began with a call to “all peoples” and “all inhabitants of the world.” Pretty straightforward point today that impacts every single human being: you can’t take your stuff with you when you die. Somebody put it very well that death is pretty democratic; it doesn’t care if you’re rich or if you’re poor. You can’t bribe death into letting you live longer.

I think we get that, but here’s where the Psalmist kicks us in the gut: “Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases.” Look, rich people overly consumed in their consumption of stuff have a problem. We get that.

But if you’re overly consumed in your lack of consumption of stuff -- you have a problem too. In other words, if you’re sad that you don’t have a 401K; the house; the right income level; the best fishing equipment; the college fund for you kid -- and you’re going around -- “Woah, is me. I can’t do anything without those things” -- you have a problem just as big as the person who’s consumed by their wealth.

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As we move out of pandemic realities, one of the big moments in it all was the dispersal of stimulus money. That money really shouldn’t have been that big of deal to me - when I think about it. I was able to maintain my job throughout COVID. I didn’t stop working, and you were gracious in paying my salary. I didn’t *NEED* that money...but there was a part of me that was convinced I *NEEDED* or I *DESERVED* that money.

The IRS had created a special app for phones where you could check the status of the last stimulus payment that went out. It told you when you’d receive your money. There were days where I was checking my phone 2-3 times a day. I needed to know that that money was on its way to my checking account.

And underneath my checking my phone was this attitude brewing: “I deserve that money because I’m under a certain income threshold - I’m oppressed!” “I need that money for my savings.” “I’m taxed enough! I’ve earned a break!” What was happening inside me? One word: FEAR.

The Psalmist asks: “Why should I fear in times of trouble...those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?” You can boast that you’re rich; you can also boast that you don’t have anything. That’s why I was checking my phone 2-3 times a day and celebrating a pity party in my head. I feared that I wasn’t like somebody else who had more than me. Or, I was a somebody that deserved more money because “I’m the little guy of America.”

And here’s why ALL people have to consider Psalm 49. This overconsumption with having stuff *OR* marinating in the fact that you don’t possess stuff like somebody else does, is inhumane; it will rot your core. The Psalm has a line it repeats twice: “Man in his pomp [pride] will not remain, **he is like the beasts that perish.**” This hope and trust in money to make you happy transforms you into a beast; into something that isn’t human anymore.

Bible example: King David had the hots for a woman named Bathsheba. One problem, they were already married. But that didn’t stop him. He impregnated her. To cover his tracks David sent Bathesaba’s husband who was a special forces commando in his army to fight a battle where Uriah would die. And he did. This rich king with multiple wives stole the wife of a loyal soldier, and then he murdered the soldier in the process. But when the news reached him that the loyal husband had died in combat, David shrugged off the news and more or less said, “That will happen in war.” Uriah had protected David for decades -- he had helped make David who he was, but David’s overconsumption of stuff - in this case pleasure - prevented David from being human...to weep at the news of a fallen comrade in arms.

Pride in riches or your focus on your lack of stuff is like the Beast from Beauty and the Beast. He was a prince; he had servants, a castle, fine dining...he had it all. When the beggar woman asked for help, he had the ability to help her -- but he was too into himself and his wealth. He slammed the door on her. A human being with the means to help, shut an elderly woman out into the freezing cold. That’s inhumane! So the beggar woman - who was a magical witch the whole time - transformed the prince into the thing he was acting like...a horrible beast.

We may not be able to see it on the outside, but if we're convinced money will make us eternally happy; help us avoid aging or death -- underneath...is a roaming beast that is slowly losing its humanity.

If you're constantly hunting for wealth through scratcher tickets, you're an anemic coyote living from dollar to dollar. But your scavenging prevents you from being truly human: generously giving to support others or saving or investing. And when people hear coyotes howling in the night, their response is not, "Oh, I'm gonna go help that little guy." Unhealthy, consistent consumption of things like lotto tickets reveals what you love -- because you're putting your money where your mouth is -- and others see that, and they see you don't have time for them.

If you're in a safe place in your life financially speaking -- you worked hard and it paid off. Good...but be careful. Because you have to ask yourself, "Why do I have all this wealth saved up? Why, sometimes, am I being so cheap?" And here's why you need to ask yourself those questions: "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life,..." Look, a squirrel can work very hard and save an impressive storehouse of nuts and corn and straw to survive winter. But what happens if that squirrel just leaves his hole for one day and he's squished by a car. Can the squirrel bribe death with corn? Of course, not. He's dead.

If you're at a point in your life where you are financially well off -- remember...squirrels are fragile. A bad fall from a high tree or a car can negate all their hard work. Why are you hoarding? Is it fear that's driving you?

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On our altar we have two candles. Typically, we light these candles only for Communion. They're a reminder that Jesus has two natures: He is divine or God; He is also human. When we celebrate Communion we consume all of Jesus: His divine *AND* human nature. By definition Jesus is the divine Son of God *AND* the human baby boy of Mary. But all in all, He's one person of the Trinity.

The Psalm claims, "Truly no **MAN** can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life,..." There is no human whose paycheck is so high that he can buy off death *OR* a man who's so disenfranchised and down on his luck that he deserves escaping death. "No man can...give to God the price of his life."

That's why Jesus matters! He is God; He's also a human. According to what we would call His Divine Nature, He can pay the fee for our lives, PLUS He has the resources to put a hit out on Death. You can't buy yourself out of dying. But Jesus bought you out of long term death.

Literally, it says, "God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol." The picture is of you in your hospice room. Death is about to grab you and move you to a room that says "**Forever Gone**." But God swoops in, and by His power, by His hand He snatches you out just at the last second.

Jesus has the power and the track record to buy your life from death. He has done that for you, and your future will never be the same: verse 14: "Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning." Death isn't your shepherd anymore. The Good Shepherd, Jesus is, and now you - the upright - will rule over the lost ones in the morning. Morning talk in the Bible is typically a nod to the resurrection of the dead.

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If you are dedicated to a future life where there is no more dying. Safety. No wars. Radical riches that will most likely be useless to us since we'll be in the presence of Christ -- and we won't care. If that's all yours, it's time to become human again.

Shed the coyote costume -- because you don't need cheap lotto wins to be happy. You'll just end up dead like everybody else if that's your source of happiness. Stop letting money use you; you use money.

For my squirrels out there -- saving corn and nuts up for winter -- it's time to let go. God has placed people in your life to enrich and there are ways of doing so that you are still being responsible. But pretending like your savings and income will prevent your demise is foolish.

What's wise though is to entrust yourself to Jesus -- the One who historically and financially undid death for you. And when you take that to the bank, it will transform how you do money as well as how you view death. Amen.